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Summary: JAMAICA PLAIN - GENERAL NEIGHBORHOOD RENEWAL PLAN

Prepared by staff of Boston Redevelopment Authority, Fall 1962

The General Neighborhood Renewal Plan covers the part of Jamaica Plain which lies between Franklin Park, the Arboretum, the Jamaicaway, and Heath Street.

Jamaica Plain has always been one of the most picturesque districts of the City, noted for its handsome homes. When annexed to Boston in 1874 this was the most rural part of the enlarged city, abounding in charming scenery. It had pleasant roadways and grassy by-paths, spacious country-seats with fruit and flower gardens, and picturesque villas set in well cultivated grounds. It still retains a semi-rural feeling in some areas; but like its neighbors Roxbury and Dorchester, it grew with great rapidity at the end of the last century.

In early times Jamaica Plain was chiefly an agricultural community of gentleman farmers whose lands provided fresh produce for the city markets. Jamaica Pond was the first water supply for the town of Boston; and pipes of pitch pine logs used in the construction of the aqueducts in 1795 have come to light during more recent excavations in parts of the City. Some of the large estates in the area were either donated to or bought by the City at the end of the century to form the great chain of public parks which extends from the Arboretum and Franklin Park to the Charles River.

The urbanization of Jamaica Plain began as early as 1826 when the Boston and Providence railroad brought the area closer to the heart of Boston. Nearness to Boston, fresh water from Jamaica Pond, and Stony Brook water power

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were the basis for the industrial development of the valley. Textile mills, printing shops, founderies, lumber and stone yards, and breweries gave birth to a "mill village" in the vicinity of today's Jackson Square as early as 1850. By the end of the century the street railways and steam trains made Jamaica Plain accessible to the middle classes pushing out from central Boston; estates were sub-divided and dense urban housing was constructed. The railroad crossing law of the 1890's resulted in the construction of a Chinese wall railroad bed which in turn caused much of the development along the railroad line to become blighted. The overhead elevated line built along Washington Street a few years later contributed further to the gradual deterioration of the eastern portion of the GNR. Parts of Jamaica Plain, however, still retain today some of its early green and country character.

In recent years Jamaica Plain has remained an unusually stable area compared to some other districts in the City. The 1960 population of 41,606 is only 2% less than the 1950 population. (The City as a whole declined 14% in population in the decade). In other respects - occupational, income, and age-sex distributions - the population of Jamaica Plain today is also similar to that of the City as a whole. Females slightly outnumber males; the main occupation is the "operatives" category for males, the "clerical" category for females; and the median family income in 1960 was \$5,800 compared to \$5,700 for the City. The statistical similarity of Jamaica Plain to the City is due to the heterogeneity of the district's population.

✓ The condition of housing in Jamaica Plain varies greatly from severely blighted housing along parts of the railroad track and under the elevated on Washington Street to excellent housing in the Jamaica Pond neighborhood. In





the district as a whole, roughly one-third of the housing is dilapidated or deteriorating; the rest requires only minor repair or conservation in its present good condition.

Industry covers only a small amount (3%) of the land area in Jamaica Plain today, but over 20,000 people are employed in the district. Industrial activity is located mainly along the railroad track and in one large building on Bickford and Centre Streets. Lack of expansion room, difficult access to the site, and conflict with adjacent residences create environmental problems for the industry.

Neighborhood shopping in Jamaica Plain takes place along Centre Street, the original spine connecting Dedham and Boston. Today, while fast-moving vehicles take other routes, Centre Street is the locus of community activity. Most of the stores along the street deal with convenience goods and services; there are few vacancies. But parking is inadequate and the street is frequently congested.

Community facilities in Jamaica Plain, as in other parts of Boston, are in many cases old and obsolete. For example, the Old Agassiz School, built in 1849, is still in use. With respect to parks and playgrounds, Jamaica Plain is fortunate in being surrounded on three sides by major public open spaces; i.e., Franklin Park and the Arboretum and Jamaica Pond. But for children, access to these parks is hazardous; major roads separate them from the community.

Jamaica Plain, centrally located in Boston, straddles the valley connecting the City with the southwestern portion of the metropolitan area.



This valley already contains the railroad line; it is a natural corridor for moving vehicles which avoid the steep slopes on either side. Thus in the future this valley is likely to be a heavy movement corridor for automobiles as well as rail and transit. In an east-west direction, Jamaica Plain is also confronted with a traffic problem as cars filter through residential streets for lack of an adequate cross-town route.

In summary, the present-day problems which a plan for the future of Jamaica Plain must resolve are the inefficiencies and blighting effect of the mixture of residential and industrial uses, the inadequacy of streets in meeting the demand for southwest and cross-town movement, the access to the surrounding parks, and the poor condition of housing and community facilities in certain parts of the district.

Beyond the solution of these specific problems, the objectives of the plan are to maintain Jamaica Plain as a residential district for family living and to design future transportation facilities so as to minimize their adverse impact on residential areas.

Specifically, the plan proposes:

A. Residential

1. To construct about 1,600 new residential units, primarily in two- and three-story structures, on 36 acres of land requiring clearance.
2. To conserve and rehabilitate 10,000 housing units in good and fair condition today.



B. Commercial

1. To provide 18 acres along new transportation facilities in the valley for extensive commercial development oriented to automobile trade.
2. To eliminate the marginal retail activity along Washington Street when the elevated is relocated and to concentrate shopping at Egleston Square.
3. To strengthen Centre Street as a local shopping area by improving off-street parking and introducing amenities.

C. Industrial

1. To improve conditions for existing industry by providing better access to major transportation routes and clarifying the local street pattern.
2. To provide ten acres for industrial expansion in the strip between the railroad track and Washington Street.
3. To limit industrial development to a well-defined area in the valley thus eliminating undesirable effects on nearby residential areas.

D. Institutional

To accept the pressures for expansion of small institutions with a living-in clientele because of the district's central location, proximity to medical facilities, and building types suitable for conversion to such use.





E. Schools

To build four new schools and one addition to replace the Agassizes, Bowditch, Fuller, Lowell, and Wyman.

F. Parks, Playgrounds, and other Community Facilities

1. To create three new playgrounds for young children adjacent to new elementary schools.
2. To construct two pedestrian overpasses on the Jamaica way at Perkins Street and at the entrance to the Arboretum to make access to these facilities easier for residents of Jamaica Plain.
3. To replace the existing obsolete fire station with a new facility at South Street near Centre Street.
4. To abandon the police station at Seaverns Street and consolidate it with a new facility outside the GNRP.
5. To construct a new health unit near Curtis Hall on Centre Street and to make available more space for indoor recreation at Curtis Hall; also to construct a community center as part of the addition to Roosevelt Junior High School.

G. Circulation

1. To concentrate the demand for southwest movement in the valley so that the adverse impact of through-traffic will be minimized. Future transportation facilities located in the valley will include the railroad, transit relocated from Washington Street, and an expressway. (The current proposal for the southwest expressway (I-95) by the State Department of Public Works requires further study and modification before it is acceptable to the City.)



2. To reduce traffic filtering through residential streets in an east-west direction by channeling it to improved Heath and Green Streets.

3. If an expressway is built, to modify the adjacent street pattern in order to fit in with the new service roads, etc. and provide parcels of land adequate for commercial and industrial development.

The GNRP indicates areas in which the proposed action is clearance and those in which it is predominantly conservation and rehabilitation. Clearance areas are in the worst structural condition and, because of proposed changes in land use or street pattern require extensive clearance. For the most part these areas lie in the valley adjacent to the railroad track and the elevated on Washington Street. The remainder of the Jamaica Plain GNRP is a rehabilitation area where clearance would remove isolated, seriously dilapidated structures.

It is proposed that Jamaica Plain be considered as one urban renewal project to be undertaken at the time of the construction of new transportation facilities along the railroad. Since most of the blight in the district is concentrated along the right-of-way of the future expressway, it is desirable to coordinate the execution of the renewal project with the construction of this new facility.

It is estimated that the net project cost of an urban renewal project in Jamaica Plain would be \$51,123,000 of which \$17,041,000 would be carried by the City and State, and \$34,082,000 would be a Federal grant.





STATISTICAL SUMMARY - JAMAICA PLAIN GNRP

Acres in GNRP: 1063

\*Population: 1950-- 42,433  
1960-- 41,606 (2% decline compared to  
13% for City as a whole)

GNRP proposal-- 39,000

\*Income, Median Family: \$5,857 (compared to \$5,747 for City as  
as a whole)

\*Housing Units: Total-- 12,550  
Public Housing-- 528  
GNRP Proposal-- 11,580 units  
1,600 new units  
9,980 retained units

Condition of Structures (BRA Survey, 1961):

	<u>All Structures</u>	<u>Residential</u>
(A) Good condition	359	315
(B) In need of minor repair	3039	2820
(C) In need of major repair	1504	1324
(D) Poor condition	370	315
Total	5326	4774

Project Costs, Estimated:

Land Acquisition	\$11,681,550
Demolition	12,965,000
Project Improvements	14,569,000
Community Facilities	8,431,000
Administration and Interest	6,497,450
Gross Project Cost	54,144,000
Land Disposition Proceeds	3,021,000
Net Project Cost	51,123,000
State and City Share	17,041,000
Federal Capital Grant	34,082,000
Relocation Grant	484,000

\* Source: 1960 U.S. Census of Population and Housing





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